

They talk; they tell her what to do. And one night they told her that her daughter Glenda's no-good husband — on a night when he stayed out late for no good reason — was out chasing young tail.

And the spirits were right.

Forget that the hapless fellow didn't catch any.

So the old lady, acting on spirit info, wedged a chair under the front doorknob, shut off the garage door opener, and jammed a stick into the track of the sliding glass door. When Bob came knocking late that night, she told him he was evil, that he was probably bringing home AIDS and genital warts.

"So what have you been up to?" Glenda asked as she let him in the sliding glass door into their bedroom. Her mother answered for him from the other side of the hallway door: "Been steppin' out." Bob clarified things: "Been blowin' sax; met a girl who could sing the blues." Glenda placed her fingertips to her jaw and said, "The blues, you say?" Bob shook his head. "Been thinking of asking her to join the band." Glenda brought her palms together in a prayer pose and said, "Indeed?"

That night Glenda seduced Bob, and she was satisfied that he had been true. Had he made love to the young blues singer, he never would have been able to perform for his wife. Not at his age. She wiped the sweat from his high forehead — she had made him work — and rolled over and fell asleep, while Bob lay on his back staring at the ceiling, picturing Amber's naked body through shimmering turquoise, while Ellie Morgan tuned into a blank channel that told her Bob Urp was bad right down to the bone.

DETECTIVE WORK BLUES

A little light detective work led Bob Urp to Amber Gale's abode: one of the small hotels down by the shore that had devolved into a weekly rental place catering to transients and various other societal belly-clingers. He showed up at the door in a pseudo-avuncular mode, stepped in and sat down on the improvised sofa — a two-by-six spanning a couple of cinder blocks — and talked to her and her boyfriend, Roger Karpuk, PFC in the United States Marines, about her musical endeavors, about the blues, blew encouraging words Amber's way while young Roger threw back shots of bourbon and chased them with beers, in dead silence.

Fifteen minutes after Bob's departure, Amber lay bleeding, near death, with a concussion, a fractured eye socket and several missing teeth.

The cops picked up Roger Karpuk in a downtown bar four blocks from the apartment. He told them he didn't do it, told them about a pervert named Bob Urp. They picked up the alleged pervert at his house, got him out of his pajamas for a trip downtown, proving to Eloise Morgan, his live-in mother-in-law, that the spirits she'd been in contact with had been right about him all along.

SOME GUYS

Amber Gale's boyfriend took things a step beyond domestic discord, beat the shit out of her and knocked out several of her perfect white teeth. Amber moaned the blues through the stumps of her incisors, then she went back home to Mom and Dad, fell into their arms, became the recipient of good company-provided dental care.

With a mouthful of crooked and off-colored temporary caps, she sang Robert Johnson blues on a street corner on the coast route in the old downtown in the city of Loma Alta on a hot Sunday night, collected loose change and small bills in a hat from passing Marines who were unfamiliar with the blues, but knew a nice body when they saw one. When one of those young Marines — Roger Roff fresh out of Little Rock — insisted, to the point of strong-arming, buying her dinner or a drink, Amber scooped up her money, broke free and dashed over to the Burger 'N' Run and hid out in the Ladies' Room.

The night manager of the place, a portly middle-aged man named Ellis Leahy, noticed the agitated Marine lying in wait outside the rest room's foyer, and he called over the counter, "Hey, hotshot, time for you to hit the road; I don't think the lady is interested." He'd watched the girl from his drive-thru window, had witnessed her escape. The Marine told Ellis Leahy to mind his own fucking business, then he went in and pounded on the ladies' rest room's door.

Ellis called the downtown MP headquarters, and two ramrod straight staff sergeants showed up in three minutes flat. Roger Roff tried to take them on. They clubbed him to the floor, cuffed him, dragged him outside and heaved him into the back of their white government van.

Amber emerged from the rest room, bought herself a burger and a large diet coke with a portion of the night's take, and said thank you to Ellis Leahy. Ellis gave her a dismissive wave, raised a basket of sizzling fries out of the grease and said, "You're welcome." Amber shook her head and said, "Some guys." Ellis slid her hamburger across the counter and replied, "I know what you mean."